

how we can cement our economic recovery and create the jobs of the future. President Biden's Build Back Better agenda—a big, bold investment in infrastructure and jobs—is extremely important to that effort. It has wide support among Democrats and wide support among the American people. Many, many Republicans out there in the country support this bill and this concept. The water infrastructure bill is a small but important part of that overall effort.

We hope our Republican colleagues join us in advancing these proposals to repair and reimagine our Nation's infrastructure for a new century. Just like the anti-Asian hate crimes bill, if Republicans let us get on the bill, we can work out a process to have bipartisan debate and amendments, but if the Republican minority prevents the Senate from even debating some of these commonsense proposals, we will have to try to move forward without them.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, yesterday President Biden announced that American forces will come home from Afghanistan by September 11, 2021. It has been 20 years since that fateful day when the Towers fell and the Pentagon was hit. We in New York live particularly hard with that. I still think of the people I knew who perished: a guy I played basketball with in high school; a businessman who helped me on the way up; a brave firefighter who used to go around the city urging people to donate blood together. But in that time since then, America's Armed Forces, thank God, have become extremely successful in deterring and rooting out terrorist networks around the globe.

President Obama authorized the mission that took out Osama bin Laden, the architect of the 9/11 attacks. Our intelligence agencies have assessed that al-Qaida and other terrorist groups do not pose an immediate threat to strike the United States from Afghanistan because of the brave work of our Armed Forces and intelligence organizations. So after sinking two decades of blood and treasure into wars in the Middle East, it is time to bring our troops home. America does not need to fight forever wars.

I applaud President Biden's decision. Unlike President Trump, President Biden and Secretary Austin have developed a careful and thought-out plan. This isn't President Trump waking up one morning and announcing a random new policy on Twitter while our generals scramble to catch up. This will be a careful and thought-out plan with a real timetable and a firm end date.

Whenever we talk about American troops in the Middle East, one of the concerns is missions creep and the enormous pressure to kick the can down the road and delay final decisions. We should and must stick to the date the President has proposed as the

last day our troops will be there. I have been assured by the White House that the September 11 date will stick and that President Biden will not kick the can down the road.

I know many Senators have questions, so I am happy to let my colleagues know that the administration has agreed to brief all Senators on this important decision. The briefing will take place soon. It will be in the SCIF, and everyone's questions can be asked and answered. The President himself will address the Nation later today and explain the reasons for his decision.

In my view, President Biden's plan to bring American troops home from Afghanistan is a very wise one.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader is recognized.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, "Biden takes the easy way out of Afghanistan. The likely result is disaster." This is the morning's lead editorial from one of the Nation's most liberal newspapers.

The administration has decided to abandon U.S. efforts in Afghanistan, which have helped keep radical Islamic terrorism in check, and bizarrely, they decided to do so by September 11. Apparently, we are to help our adversaries ring in the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks by giftwrapping the country and handing it right back to them.

Here is what this administration's own national intelligence threat assessment says will happen:

The Taliban is likely to make gains on the battlefield, and the Afghan government will struggle to hold the Taliban at bay if the coalition withdraws support.

This is a quote from this administration.

In 2019, the Democratic leader and the now chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee expressed outrage that the previous administration considered hosting Taliban officials for discussions around the date of September 11.

But now a Democratic administration is going to skip the negotiations and just surrender an entire country back to the Taliban on the very same date? Our President should remember what happened when the Obama administration let political considerations rush a retreat from Iraq—total chaos and bloodshed and ISIS.

Two years ago, I wrote a bipartisan amendment that warned a Republican administration against recklessly withdrawing from Afghanistan or Syria. A supermajority of Senators right here voted for it. A supermajority of Senators voted for it, warning that the terrorist threat had not abated. Where are the Democratic voices today? I hope we will hear from some of them.

Unfortunately, this mistake in Afghanistan is one of several instances of this new administration's surrendering leverage without making America, our allies, or our interests more secure.

In January, President Biden extended the New START agreement with Russia by Executive order for 5 years—no strings attached, no concessions secured, not even a shorter term extension to keep up pressure on Russia to cooperate on a better agreement. Just a gift—a gift.

And then there is Iran. Senior administration officials have gone from denigrating the former administration's "maximum pressure" strategy to simply begging for direct talks with Iran, to proactively offering to remove sanctions that are "inconsistent with the JCPOA." So which sanctions exactly are inconsistent with the JCPOA? Our sanctions on Iran's terrorist organizations or its ballistic missile program?

Most Republicans would be thrilled if President Biden could actually secure a better deal that holds Iran accountable. Giving up the leverage of sanctions before we even get to the table—before we even get to the table—or just return to a bad deal is certainly not a good sign.

It would be hard to support any deal that isn't part of a broader strategy that also confronts the nonnuclear threats Iran poses to America and to the region.

On China, the administration's tough talk has been welcome, but its proposal to cut defense spending after inflation suggests there is less interest in walking the walk. We will not keep pace with China and Russia by cutting defense spending to placate fringe parts of the far left.

The American people need and they deserve a foreign policy that puts our security, our partners, and our interests ahead of the reflexive desire to break with the last 4 years at any cost—at any cost.

If this administration wants a successful legacy on the world stage, if they want accomplishments that will endure, they need to put American strength back at the center and come back to a bipartisan mainstream.

THE FOR THE PEOPLE ACT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Now, Mr. President, on a completely different matter, we know Democrats are desperate to create a national controversy over voting regulations, but the facts and the truth keep getting in the way.

For more than a year, we have seen a coordinated campaign to call any